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Review of Marko Ivan Rupnik, S.J.'s "In the Fire of the Burning Bush: An Initiation to the Spiritual Life"

Jason Paul Bourgeois
jbourgeois1@udayton.edu

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Marko Ivan RUPNIK, *In the Fire of the Burning Bush: An Initiation to the Spiritual Life*. Translated by Susan Dawson Vásquez. Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004. 109 pp. \$15.00 pb. ISBN 0-8028-2832-9. Reviewed by Jason Paul BOURGEOIS.

This little book, part of the Ressourcement series of William B. Eerdmans, is written by a European Jesuit priest with profound sympathies for the Eastern Christian tradition, as evidenced by the inclusion of many introductory quotes from Soloviev and Greek patristic authors. It is composed of two separate treatises, one on the spiritual life and the other on spiritual fatherhood. The second treatise is a better place to begin, as it is more concise and treats an interesting and largely foreign topic to Western audiences.

The treatise on spiritual fatherhood begins with a critique of the postmodern situation, which is detached from objectivity and traps one in a psychological subjectivism. This creates a situation of spiritual emptiness and boredom, and can result in a fractured personality. Since God is found in loving relationships and through human beings, it is sometimes necessary for people to take on a "spiritual father," who will aid them in the process of integrating every aspect of their fractured life in relationship to God. The spiritual father (or mother, as the author makes clear in a footnote) should be able: to be open to the work of the Spirit to discern hearts, to situate himself within the tradition of great spiritual masters, to pray for others and act as a mediator with God even during conversations with them, to communicate mercy and contribute to the healing of memory, and to be careful not to foster dependence on himself but rather to direct a person towards God.

Perhaps most interesting in this treatise is the portion on the healing and purification of memory, in which Rupnik suggests that the primary task of the spiritual father is to accept others as they are, and to allow them to understand all their positive and negative experiences in light of relationship to God. This entails an honest discussion of sin, without condemnation, that helps the person to re-contextualize their sin in light of the mercy of God. Although the author does not point it out explicitly, this idea is also applicable to community self-reflection and purification of memory as well.

The first treatise examines the phenomenon of contemporary Christian spirituality, but it is marred by a dry and abstract introductory chapter that condemns a number of "isms." The most interesting of these is perhaps his look at psychologism; he critiques seminary formation programs and spiritual directors for focusing on solving psychological problems so that one is free from mental suffering (but not necessarily any closer to God), rather than fostering a spiritual relationship with God that

understands imperfections and sufferings (even mental illnesses) in light of this relationship.

Rupnik completes the first treatise by looking at the characteristics of the Christian spiritual life: it is deeply Trinitarian, it is sacramental (which entails a rediscovery of the role and importance of the body and matter in Christian spirituality), it must be integrated into theology and theological anthropology to be genuine, it encompasses all of human experience including sin and death, and its ultimate aim is for its bearer to find God in everything and to become theophanic. Authentic Christian spirituality is verified by humility and love, including love for one's enemies, and by willingness to sacrifice oneself and one's deepest attachments for the sake of love. The spiritual life makes people and cultures able to dialogue and communicate, and leads to the true vocation of Christian life and resurrection.

This work is short and somewhat dense, with occasional flashes of true spiritual poetry. It is most suitable for spiritual directors, those interested in Eastern Christian perspectives on spirituality, and as a supplementary graduate text for spirituality courses.